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Written on AUGUST 24, 2011 AT 7:30 AM by PDILLARD

# Navy Medicine's Combat & Operational Stress Center Enters 4th Year

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Capt. Scott Johnston, program director for the Naval Center for Combat and Operational Stress Control.

By Navy Capt. Scott L. Johnston, Ph.D, ABPP, MSC, Director, Naval Center for Combat & Operational Stress Control

Building, preserving and—as necessary—restoring the psychological health of our Sailors and Marines are some of the greatest challenges the Navy faces in the wake of more than a decade of war, multiple deployments and increasingly stressful workloads.

At the Naval Center for Combat & Operational Stress Control (NCCOSC), we are proud to be a cornerstone of Navy Medicine's dedication to address these issues. We work to improve the psychological health of Sailors and Marines through programs that:

- Educate service members and demystify stress
- Build resilience
- Aid research
- Promote best practices in the treatment of combat and operational stress injuries.

NCCOSC is entering its fourth year of operation this fall, and it's a good time to provide an overview of the center's activities. Currently, we have numerous initiatives underfoot that I'd like to share.

We are developing Psychological Health Pathways (PHP) to standardize how Sailors and Marines with stress-related injuries are clinically assessed, assigned treatment and monitored for progress.

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In tandem with PHP, NCCOSC is implementing a web-based registry and tracking tool designed to support the most effective case management for wounded, ill and injured service members.

The center's research facilitation department collaborates with Navy Line, Fleet Marine Forces and Navy Medicine clinicians and community researchers who may lack time, experience or other support in study design or data collection, management and analysis.

A sampling of studies the department currently supports includes a computer-based attention re-training program to reduce symptoms of anxiety in military personnel, assessment of functioning in patients taking antidepressants in relation to firearms, and the long-term Marine Resilience Study.

Education for war fighters of all levels is a major focus for NCCOSC, and the center develops, designs and implements training materials and briefs in Combat and Operational Stress Control for a variety of Navy communities. The emphasis of these programs is on the early detection of stress injuries and leadership's role in monitoring the psychological health of their people. To date, more than 100 outreach presentations have been given.

An important component of all outreach activities at NCCOSC is to erase any stigma associated with seeking help for psychological health issues. To this end, the center produces a quarterly newsletter and an engaging website and social media presence that emphasize the facts about post-traumatic stress disorder and other stress injuries, as well as publicizing many success stories from Sailors and Marines who have sought help.

The Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery recently asked NCCOSC to evaluate a number of training programs aimed at building psychological resilience and to make recommendations about the content of a program that possibly would be implemented Navywide. It's an assignment that the center is enthusiastically undertaking as we begin our fourth year of operation.

The highlight for NCCOSC each year is the center's presentation of the Combat and Operational Stress Control Conference, traditionally held in the spring in San Diego. This event is unlike others because it brings together military leaders (senior and junior), researchers, health professionals and military family members to discuss our common interest in helping our warfighters.

Details about the 2012 COSC Conference will soon be available on our website, [www.nccosc.navy.mil](http://www.nccosc.navy.mil). I hope you will check it out.

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